

**The Hindu Important News Articles & Editorial For UPSC
CSE**

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The visit of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to the Iranian Embassy on March 5, 2026, marks a decisive end to India's initial "studied silence" regarding the killing of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. Occurring against the backdrop of a widening U.S.-Israel war on Iran and the subsequent blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, this outreach reflects India's attempt to navigate a high-stakes geopolitical minefield. It balances a deep-rooted strategic partnership with Tehran against critical defense ties with Israel and the United States.

Key Diplomatic Developments

Condolence Diplomacy: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri signed the condolence book on behalf of the Government of India, providing formal recognition of the transition and offering commiserations to the Iranian state.

High-Level Dialogue: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a telephonic conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi, emphasizing the need for an early "cessation of hostilities."

Addressing the 'Existential War': Iranian interlocutors have categorized the current conflict as an existential struggle, warning that the closure of the Strait of Hormuz is a direct response to the U.S.-Israel coalition's actions.

Strategic Challenges for India

The conflict presents a multi-pronged crisis for Indian foreign policy:

1. Maritime Security and the Diaspora

India's primary concern remains the safety of over one crore Indian expatriates in the Gulf and the protection of Indian sailors on commercial vessels. The death of three Indian sailors in recent tanker attacks has added a layer of friction to the India-Iran relationship.

2. Energy Security and Economic Stability

With the Strait of Hormuz—a vital artery for global energy—facing de facto closure, India is actively seeking alternative energy suppliers to absorb the "energy shockwave" and prevent domestic economic disruption.

3. The 'Third Party' Friction

Tehran has expressed disappointment over India's hesitation to explicitly condemn the assassination. The Iranian side views the influence of "third parties" (U.S. and Israel) as a growing reality in New Delhi's decision-making process, challenging the "strategic autonomy" India usually prides itself on.

India condoles Khamenei death as Misri visits Embassy of Iran

The Supreme Leader was killed in U.S.-Israel strikes. Jaishankar dials Iranian counterpart Araghchi. Iranian interlocutor says 'Tehran is facing an 'existential war' and that access to the Strait of Hormuz for energy buyers remains uncertain

Kallol Bhattacharjee
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday condoned the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated in the opening salvo of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran on February 28.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri signed the book of condolence that was opened at the Embassy of Iran here, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a round of telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi.

The outreach from India coincided with remarks from a senior Iranian interlocutor who announced here that Iran is facing an "existential war" and that access to the Strait of Hormuz for energy buyers remains uncertain in the current circumstances.

"Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and signed the condolence book, on behalf of the people and the Government of India, on the demise of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei," said External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaishankar.

India had so far remained silent following the



Offering commiserations: Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, on behalf of the Government of India, signed the condolence book at the Embassy of Iran in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

assassination of Khamenei. The conversations between Indian and Iranian officials coincided with senior Iranian officials expressing disappointment over India's unwillingness to condemn the assassination of Khamenei as officials in the External Affairs Ministry expressed disappointment over Iran targeting oil tankers, which left at least three Indian sailors dead. The overall state of current India-Iran relations came up during the Jaishankar-Araghchi telephone conversation, with sources indicating that India is urging for an "early cessation of hostilities" and conveying to all sides that safety of Indian citizens in the West

Iranian states and on oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz is of utmost interest.

Iranian strikes

A senior Iranian diplomatic source, however, argued that Tehran's retaliation to the U.S.-Israeli attacks was "precise and deliberate" and was aimed at the military and intelligence assets of its adversaries. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, the source said, was part of Iran's strategy to deal with the "existential threat" posed by the U.S.-Israel coalition. He said that Iran's relation with India had been "consistent" and that Iran expected that "third party"

like Israel or the U.S. would never be able to influence that relation. He expressed disappointment that third parties are at present a reality in India-Iran relations.

"All our actions are based on what we had told our neighbours before the beginning of the war. We had told them that this is what we would have to do if your airbases and assets are used to attack us," said the official pointing to the attacks on U.S. military bases in the West Asian states and the choking of the Strait of Hormuz. "We stop attacks as soon as they stop. We were pragmatic and that is why we went for negotiation with the U.S.

but now that they started the war we are left with no other strategy apart from resisting. We have to resist and that is our only strategy," said the senior Iranian official.

Explaining Iran's position on the situation at the Strait of Hormuz, he pointed to the insurance companies that are backing out of extending insurance to cargo vessels and said, "It is not just Iran's Army that has closed the Strait of Hormuz." He said there was a moral and ethical requirement on every stakeholder to condemn the killing of Khamenei, saying, "We call upon everyone, including India, to condemn the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. That they can decapitate or assassinate the head of another state at will is a breach of law and this breach of law is going to haunt everyone."

"Trying to balance the interest of the West Asian states that host more than a crore Indian expatriate workers and Iran, which controls the Strait of Hormuz, India has maintained a cautious approach in the conflict. Against this backdrop, India has reached out to multiple suppliers to ensure that the energy shockwave of the conflict is absorbed without disrupting the Indian economy."

Key Analysis: The "Balancing Act"

This situation exemplifies the Realist school of international relations. India is not just choosing between two sides but is managing a "trilemma":

Relationship with Iran: Essential for regional connectivity (Chabahar Port) and energy.

Relationship with U.S.-Israel: Vital for technology, defense, and counter-terrorism.

Regional Stability: Necessary for the safety of the Indian diaspora and economic growth.

Conclusion

India's visit to the Iranian Embassy is a calculated gesture of solidarity aimed at maintaining a communication channel with Tehran during its most vulnerable moment. While India remains cautious about condemning the U.S.-led military action, it cannot afford a total collapse of the Iranian state or a prolonged blockade of the Persian Gulf. Moving forward, New Delhi's role will likely be that of a quiet mediator, pushing for the safety of civilian transit while bracing for a reshaped West Asian order.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: India's response to the current Iran crisis reflects a policy of strategic autonomy. Critically examine the challenges and opportunities in India-Iran relations. (150 Words)



The bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Alexander Stubb in New Delhi resulted in the elevation of ties to a "Strategic Partnership in Digitalization and Sustainability." Amidst global volatility in West Asia and Ukraine, both leaders underscored that military action is not a viable solution for long-term resolution, advocating instead for the "rule of law, dialogue, and diplomacy."

Key Highlights of the Visit

1. Strategic Partnership & Technology

New Framework: The transition to a "Strategic Partnership in Digitalization and Sustainability" focuses on trust-based technology and resilient supply chains.

6G Leadership: A Joint Task Force on 6G was established, linking the University of Oulu (Finland) with the **Bharat 6G Alliance**.

Emerging Tech: Both nations agreed to form a Joint Working Group on Digitalization, covering AI, quantum computing, and semiconductors.

2. Trade and Economic Cooperation

Trade Targets: With the India-EU FTA finalized in early 2026, both sides aim to double bilateral trade (currently \$1.5 billion–\$2 billion) by 2030.

Startup Corridor: Launch of the Indo-Finland Startup Corridor to facilitate mutual participation in events like 'Slush' (Helsinki) and 'Startup Mahakumbh' (New Delhi).

3. Sustainability and Climate Action

Green Energy: MoUs were exchanged regarding renewable energy, including green hydrogen, bioenergy, and solar power.

Circular Economy: India and Finland will co-host the World Circular Economy Forum 2026 in India.

Industrial Benchmarks: PM Modi highlighted the world's largest bamboo-to-bioethanol refinery in Assam as a prime example of Finnish-Indian green collaboration.

4. Mobility and Education

Conflicts can't be resolved solely by military action: PM on West Asia, Ukraine

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

India and Finland will support all efforts to end the conflicts in West Asia and Ukraine at the earliest, said Prime Minister Narendra Modi after talks with Finland's President Alexander Stubb, stressing that there are no military solutions to any conflict.

The two leaders met on Thursday and announced a "Strategic partnership in digitalization and sustainability", an MoU on mobility for Indian professionals particularly for jobs in innovation and technology, and a partnership on 6G telecommunications.

The visit by Mr. Stubb, who was here as chief guest for the Raisina Dialogue organised by the External Affairs Ministry, came weeks after the finalisation of the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, and both sides committed to doubling current bilateral trade levels of \$1.5 billion-\$2 billion as a result of the FTA.

"India and Finland both believe in the rule of law, dialogue, and diplomacy," said Mr. Modi during a ceremony to exchange agreements. "We are in agreement that no issue can be resolved solely through military conflict. Whether in Ukraine or in West Asia, we will continue to sup-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with the President of Finland, Alexander Stubb, in New Delhi on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

port every effort aimed at the early end of conflict and the restoration of peace," he added.

Ministry Secretary (West) Sibi George confirmed that the two leaders had discussed developments in West Asia. While the joint statement referred to the need to establish a "comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine through dialogue and diplomacy, based on the principles of the UN Charter and international law, including independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity", it did not refer to the situation in the Gulf, Iran or Israel.

Delivering the inaugural keynote address at the Raisina Dialogue, Mr. Stubb said that international politics was unpredictable, where "might is right" and violence have once again become a "foreign policy tool" of choice, criticising

Russia for the invasion of Ukraine. Without naming the U.S. and Iran, he said there was a "rapid escalation" between countries who were "pushing for diplomatic solutions".

Mr. Stubb said that since 1947, India has based foreign policy on a "pragmatic and realistic worldview".

"You've [India has] shown the rest of the world what strategic caution and safeguarding autonomy means, all the while championing multilateralism and global cooperation... it is time that we all became a little bit more India," he said, adding that non-alignment and multi-alignment had made India more independent from "one partner or bloc". The two sides exchanged agreements on cooperation in renewable energies, including bioenergy, green hydrogen, as well as wind, solar and small hydro power.

Daily News Analysis

Migration Agreement: A Migration and Mobility Partnership Agreement was signed to facilitate the movement of skilled professionals and students, particularly in the R&D sector.

Educational Reform: Agreements were reached on teacher training and research into the "future of education," leveraging Finland's global reputation in pedagogy.

Geopolitical Significance

Conflict Resolution: India and Finland issued a joint call for a "comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine" based on the UN Charter and territorial integrity.

Multilateralism: President Stubb endorsed India's bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, calling it "of utmost importance" for modern global governance.

Strategic Autonomy: The Finnish President praised India's "pragmatic and realistic" foreign policy, suggesting that the world should become "a little bit more India" by embracing multi-alignment.

Related Static Section

Aspect	Details
Historical Ties	Diplomatic relations established in 1949. Finland was one of the first countries to recognize India's independence.
Nordic-India Summit	A unique format where India engages with five Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) on innovation and climate.
Arctic Council	India is an Observer; Finland is a member. Collaboration includes polar research and climate change monitoring in the Arctic region.
Key Infrastructure	Finnish architects collaborated on the Chenab Bridge (world's highest railway bridge).

Conclusion

The India-Finland partnership has evolved from a traditional buyer-seller relationship into a deep technological alliance. By aligning Finland's innovation-led economy with India's massive digital public infrastructure and market scale, the two nations are creating a blueprint for "democratic and responsible" technology ecosystems. This partnership not only strengthens India's "Make in India" and "Digital India" initiatives but also positions India as a stabilizing force in a fragmented global order.

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: The elevation of India-Finland relations to a "Strategic Partnership in Digitalization and Sustainability" reflects the growing importance of technology and green cooperation in international relations. Examine. **(150 Words)**

Page 06 : GS II : Social Justice / Prelims Exam

India accounts for nearly one-fifth of the global cervical cancer burden, with roughly 1.25 lakh new cases and 75,000 deaths reported annually. To combat this, the Government of India has initiated a massive campaign under the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

While the indigenous vaccine Cervavac was expected to be the mainstay, the government has currently opted for the proven Gardasil-4 (Merck) for its immediate rollout for 1.15 crore girls. The core of the current debate lies in the dosage efficacy and the integration of "Make in India" products into the national health framework.

Key Highlights of the News

Current Rollout: The government has launched a campaign to vaccinate 14-year-old girls using **Gardasil-4**, a quadrivalent vaccine that has been available in India since 2009.

The Cervavac Delay: Although the indigenous Cervavac (developed by Serum Institute of India) was launched in 2022, its inclusion in the UIP is on hold pending an ICMR study.

The Single-Dose Shift: Following WHO's 2022 recommendation that a single dose provides comparable protection to two doses, ICMR is testing if Cervavac matches Gardasil's efficacy in a single-dose format. Results are expected by **2027**.

Strategic Change: The availability of "free" or subsidized doses and the shift in global dosage guidelines have altered the immediate procurement strategy of the Health Ministry.

Static Section: Contextualizing HPV and Cervical Cancer

To understand the significance of this news for the UPSC CSE, one must look at the biological and policy-related background.

1. Human Papillomavirus (HPV)

HPV is a group of more than 200 related viruses. While most infections clear up on their own, persistent infection with "high-risk" types (specifically Types 16 and 18) can lead to cervical, anal, and oropharyngeal cancers.

2. Types of Vaccines

Indian HPV vaccine under test for single-dose roll-out

An ICMR study of whether a single dose of Indian-made Cervavac vaccine generates a stable immune response compared with Gardasil will determine if it can be officially recommended

Jacob Koshy
Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

A relaxation by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the prescribed dosage for the Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine and 'free' doses may have pushed back the inclusion of an Indian-made vaccine into the national programme to inoculate children against HPV.

This is despite the Health Ministry in 2023 committing to preparing the Indian-made vaccine for inclusion in the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP), publicly available documents suggest.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on February 28, launched a campaign in Ajmer, Rajasthan, to vaccinate 1.15-crore 14-year-old girls with Gardasil-4, developed by Merck and available in India since 2009. It is one of the most well-tested HPV vaccines and part of the immunisation programmes in several countries.

The inclusion of Gardasil-4, however, pushed back Cervavac, an indige-



India has launched a campaign to vaccinate 1.15-crore 14-year-old girls with the Gardasil-4 HPV vaccine. PTI

nously developed quadrivalent HPV vaccine. Following Phase 3 trials of the vaccine that showed it was "non inferior" to Gardasil, it was officially launched in September 2022 when Science Minister Jitendra Singh lauded it as an example of the private sector and the government coming together to create an affordable product.

Reports in January 2023 said that the Health Ministry was planning to float a global tender for 16.02 crore doses of HPV vaccine in April towards the immunisation programme rol-

out in 2026. The minutes of a meeting of the National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI) – India's apex advisory body on vaccination – in July 2023 note that "...indigenously developed qHPV vaccine (Cervavac) may be considered for introduction in the UIP as a two-dose regimen".

In the same meeting, the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) had also stated, "...The introduction of the vaccine has been approved, and MoHFW is currently working on its implementation

in the UIP." However no such tender came.

The absence of Cervavac from India's current UIP is due to an ongoing study led by the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR), which is testing whether a single dose of Cervavac generates enough protective antibodies and generates a stable immune response compared with a single dose of Gardasil vaccine. The results of this study are only expected in 2027, N.K. Arora, a member of the NTAGI told *The Hindu*.

Until early 2022, the WHO recommended a two-dose schedule for administering HPV vaccines for girls in the 9-15 age group for maximum generation of antibodies.

However faced with "...stagnating pace of introductions, the low HPV vaccine coverage in many countries and the gap with the 2030 target of 90% coverage ..." a Strategic Advisory Group of Experts (SAGE) of Immunisation of the WHO, recommended in March 2022 that national immunisation programmes could use either a two-dose or a single-dose vaccination schedule.

Quadrivalent Vaccines (e.g., Gardasil, Cervavac): These protect against four types of HPV (6, 11, 16, and 18). Types 16 and 18 cause 70% of cancers, while 6 and 11 cause genital warts.

Cervavac: India's first indigenous quadrivalent HPV vaccine, developed by the Serum Institute of India (SII) in partnership with the Department of Biotechnology (DBT).

3. National Technical Advisory Group on Immunisation (NTAGI)

NTAGI is the highest advisory body in India on vaccination. It provides evidence-based recommendations to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW) regarding the introduction of new vaccines and immunization strategies.

4. Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP)

Launched in 1985, it is one of the largest public health programs in the world. It provides free vaccines against several diseases (like Polio, Measles, Hepatitis B). Adding the HPV vaccine to this list is a major step toward **Sustainable Development Goal 3.4** (reducing non-communicable diseases).

Analysis: Challenges and Opportunities

Cost vs. Sovereignty: While Gardasil is globally proven, Cervavac is expected to be significantly cheaper (estimated at ₹200–400 per dose), which is crucial for a country with a target population of millions.

Clinical Evidence: The ICMR's insistence on a "single-dose" trial for Cervavac shows a commitment to **Evidence-Based Policy**. If a single dose is proven effective, it would halve the cost and logistical burden of the national campaign.

Logistical Hurdle: Reaching 1.15 crore girls requires a robust "last-mile" delivery system, cold chain maintenance, and overcoming vaccine hesitancy among parents.

Conclusion

The transition toward a single-dose HPV vaccination strategy represents a pragmatic shift in India's public health policy, aligning with global WHO standards. While the immediate reliance on Gardasil ensures that the immunization drive does not lose momentum, the eventual integration of Cervavac remains vital for the long-term sustainability and "Atmanirbharta" (self-reliance) of India's healthcare system. Achieving the 2027 clinical milestones will be the turning point in making cervical cancer a preventable rarity in India.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Human Papillomavirus (HPV), consider the following statements:

1. HPV infection is the primary cause of cervical cancer.
2. HPV types 16 and 18 are considered high-risk strains associated with most cervical cancer cases.
3. HPV vaccines protect only against HPV types that cause genital warts.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Examine the significance of integrating indigenous vaccines such as Cervavac into India's public health programmes. What challenges must be addressed before their large-scale adoption? **(250 words)**



A recent study published in the peer-reviewed journal *Metabolism*, based on the Global Burden of Disease (GBD) 1990–2023, has highlighted a concerning trend in the Asia-Pacific region. India and China have emerged as the primary epicenters of metabolic diseases. Notably, the study reveals that in 2023, India surpassed China in terms of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs) related to Type 2 Diabetes, marking a significant shift in the regional health landscape.

Key Findings of the Study

Regional Dominance: India and China bear the highest absolute burden for five common metabolic conditions: Type 2 Diabetes, High Systolic BP, High BMI (Obesity), High LDL Cholesterol, and Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD).

India's Specific Statistics (2023):

Type 2 Diabetes: ~21 million DALYs and 5.8 lakh deaths.

High Systolic BP: ~3.8 crore DALYs and 15.7 lakh deaths.

Trend Shift: While China historically held the top position, India has now taken the lead in DALYs for diabetes, and the gap between the two nations is narrowing across other parameters.

Forecast: The study predicts a steady rise in metabolic risk factors up to 2030 unless urgent integrated prevention strategies are implemented.

Static Section: Understanding the Core Concepts

1. What are Metabolic Diseases?

These occur when the body's normal process of converting food into energy is disrupted. This includes problems with breaking down carbohydrates, proteins, or lipids. Common examples include Diabetes, Dyslipidemia (high cholesterol), and Hypertension.

2. Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs)

Definition: It is a measure of overall disease burden, expressed as the number of years lost due to ill-health, disability, or early death.

Formula: $\$DALY = YLL (\text{Years of Life Lost}) + YLD (\text{Years Lived with Disability})\$$.

One DALY represents the loss of the equivalent of one year of full health.

India, China top Asia-Pacific region in metabolic diseases burden: study

Ramya Kannan
NEW DELHI

India and China have among the highest absolute metabolic disease burdens in Asia-Pacific, a recent review of data from the Global Burden of Disease, Injuries, and Risk Factors Study (GBD), 1990–2023, revealed. It also includes forecasts up to 2030 for the Asia-Pacific region, based on these trends.

Published recently in the peer-reviewed journal *Metabolism*, the article by Huang Zhang, et al., presents an analysis of the GBD with specific reference to the Asia Pacific region. Scholars from research institutes across the world analysed estimates of disability-adjusted life years (DALYs) and mortality for five common metabolic diseases and risk factors in the region - Type 2



In 2023, India recorded about 21 million disability-adjusted life years (DALYs).

diabetes mellitus, high systolic blood pressure, high body mass index (BMI), high LDL cholesterol, and metabolic dysfunction-associated steatotic liver disease (MASLD). Metabolic diseases occur when the normal process of breaking down, storing or using energy from food is disrupted due to a range of factors.

In all the parameters considered, India and China top the list. Anoop Misra, one of the co-authors of the study and chairman, Fortis Centre for Diabetes, Obesity and Cholesterol, New Delhi, says India has one of the highest absolute metabolic disease burdens in Asia-Pacific.

"In 2023, India had approximately 21 million DALYs and 5.8 lakh deaths from type 2 diabetes. High systolic BP caused nearly 3.8 crore DALYs and about 15.7 lakh deaths. We also need to be aware that high BMI is also rising steadily, as are LDL cholesterol and MASLD," he explains.

In terms of DALYs, in 2023 India replaced China (from its top position in 1990) to lead the list of top 5 countries in the region. Under all the other four parameters, India continues to be in the second position

after China, but the gap between the nations is steadily narrowing.

Prevention strategies "This is why the time is opportune to launch urgent integrated prevention strategies," says Dr. Misra. In his opinion, the government should promote healthier diets by regulating ultra-processed foods, introducing clear front-of-pack nutrition labelling, and reducing excess sugar, salt, and unhealthy fats in commonly consumed foods. While this is done in some areas, more uniform implementation across the country is required.

He further adds that cities and communities must be redesigned to encourage daily activity through safe walking spaces, cycling tracks, and school- and workplace-based exercise programs.

3. Metabolic Dysfunction-Associated Steatotic Liver Disease (MASLD)

Formerly known as Non-Alcoholic Fatty Liver Disease (NAFLD), MASLD is characterized by fat accumulation in the liver linked to metabolic risk factors like obesity and diabetes, rather than alcohol consumption.

Proposed Prevention Strategies

Nutritional Regulation:

Implementing strict regulations on ultra-processed foods.

Mandatory Front-of-Pack Nutrition Labelling (FOPNL) to inform consumers about high sugar, salt, and fat content.

Urban Infrastructure:

Redesigning cities to promote "Active Living."

Development of safe walking zones, cycling tracks, and mandatory exercise blocks in schools and workplaces.

Policy Integration:

Moving from fragmented health schemes to an integrated "One Health" approach that addresses the common roots of metabolic disorders.

Conclusion

The transition of metabolic diseases from "diseases of affluence" to a widespread public health crisis in India poses a severe threat to the country's demographic dividend. High DALYs translate to reduced economic productivity and increased out-of-pocket expenditure for households. To meet the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3.4—reducing premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third by 2030—India must pivot from a curative healthcare model to a robust, policy-driven preventive framework.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALYs), consider the following statements:

1. DALY is a measure used to assess the overall burden of disease in a population.
2. It combines the years of life lost due to premature mortality and the years lived with disability.
3. A higher DALY value indicates a healthier population.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 2 and 3 only
- C. 1 and 2 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: C)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Metabolic diseases are emerging as a major public health challenge in India. Discuss the factors responsible for their increasing prevalence and suggest policy measures to control them. **(250 Words)**



The escalation of conflict in West Asia (March 2026) has triggered a dual crisis for Indian exporters: the closure of critical airspaces and the disruption of maritime routes through the Strait of Hormuz. This has particularly devastated the export of perishable goods (fruits, vegetables, seafood) from South India and stalled the movement of high-volume commodities like Basmati rice.

Ports see 60,000 tonne basmati rice stuck on war, exporters call for help

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

As close to 3,000 containers containing 60,000 metric tonne of basmati rice remain stuck at various Indian ports, rice exporters demanded immediate government aid to face the "severe shipping and logistics disruption" due to the war in West Asia.

Maintaining India's rice trade with Africa and West Asia together accounted for about 50% of national rice exports, the exporters urged the Union government to issue an official advisory recognising the current logistics disruption as a "force majeure type" of exceptional circumstance.

Around 90% of total rice exports towards West Asia,



There is a 40% rise in container freight rates, says Amil Goel.

worth about ₹25,000 crore a year, was basmati, exporters told *The Hindu* adding the situation had impacted business very badly.

In a letter to Chairman of the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Author-

ity (APEDA) Abhishek Dev, the Indian Rice Exporters Federation said the government must issue an official advisory or notification recognising the disruption as a *force majeure* type of exceptional circumstance.

'Ease issues'

"This will ease contractual performance issues and reduce undue pressure from buyers in the form of forced price reductions, penalties, or unilateral cancellations for circumstances beyond exporters' control. It will also support exporters' discussions with buyers, banks, insurers and logistics partners," the letter said.

Amit Goel, founder of KNAM Foods and an exporter of basmati rice, told

The Hindu exports to West Asia were 30% less than the corresponding period last year. "Business should have picked up before the beginning of Ramzan month or within Ramzan. Ships are not sailing to eastern ports of Arabic countries. We believe this is a temporary situation and very soon rice trade will bounce back as it is a staple food," Mr. Goel said.

Vice-president of IREF Dev Garg said "The major issue is with respect to containers and other logistical costs. We are seeing a 20% rise in bulk rate and about 40% rise in container freight rates. This is a very significant cost and no exporter is able to bear such a huge rise in transportation," he told *The Hindu*.

flights by carriers like Air India Express, IndiGo, and Qatar Airways has halted the daily export of 400–600 tonnes of perishables from Kerala's international airports.

Warehouse Accumulation: Perishable goods are being offloaded in local markets at "distress prices" to avoid total loss, affecting farmers' income.

Maritime Surcharges: Shipping lines have introduced "Emergency Surcharges" (\$2,000–\$4,000) due to security risks in the Strait of Hormuz.

Container Crisis: Approximately 60,000 metric tonnes of Basmati rice are stuck at ports, with freight rates for containers rising by 40%.

3. Legal and Policy Demands: Force Majeure

Exporters are urging the Government of India (specifically APEDA) to recognize the situation as a "Force Majeure" type event.

Definition: A French term meaning "superior force," referring to unforeseeable circumstances that prevent someone from fulfilling a contract.

Flight cancellations, shipping surcharge hit exporters hard

Key Disruptions and Economic Impact
Logistics & Air Cargo: The suspension of

Suspension of flights from India to West Asia disrupts supply chain for vegetables, fruits, and seafood exported from South India

Dhinesh Kallungal
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The cancellation of scheduled flights from India to West Asia has put exporters in trouble, as it has disrupted the supply chain for vegetables, fruits, and seafood exported from South India, including Kerala, which has a strong market in West Asian cities as well as in Europe. The suspension of flight services has also led to the accumulation of perishable goods in the warehouses of exporters in Kerala, forcing many to sell export-quality produce in local markets at cheaper rates.

An Instagram reel showing export-quality vegetables and fruits being sold by local vendors in the Tirur market, after they could not be exported to overseas markets through Calicut International Airport, has gone viral in Kerala. Speaking to *The Hindu*, K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the Air Cargo Agents Association of India (ACAAI), a body of airfreight forwarders with around 600 members in the State, said about 100–150 tonnes of vegetables, fruits, flowers, and seafood are exported daily to West Asian and European markets from the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport.



Edged out: The perishable goods kept at the warehouse of the Kerala State industrial Enterprises Ltd. in Kozhikode. FILE PHOTO

The total volume of perishable goods exported to overseas markets through the four international airports in Kerala is about 400–600 tonnes of cargo per day. Around 30–40% of the cargo is meant exclusively for the West Asian market, while the rest is routed to European destinations, including the U.K., France, and Italy, as well as to Canada and the U.S. Transit flights operated by Emirates and Qatar Airways are primarily used to ship consignments to Europe via Dubai and Doha.

On the other hand, exporters depend on flights operated by IndiGo, Air India Express, and Air Arabia to ship goods to the West Asian market.

The suspension of flights has led to a near-total halt in exports from Kerala and other cities in India, inflicting heavy losses

on exporters and farmers from southern India, Mr. Suresh said.

The bulk of the vegetables routed through Kerala is sourced from neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

Emergency surcharge Adding to their woes, shipping carriers have imposed an emergency surcharge ranging between \$2,000 and \$4,000 on cargo transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, citing escalating security risks. This has pushed exporters further to the brink, said Munshid Ali, secretary of the Kerala Exporters' Forum.

In the case of air shipments, airlines such as Emirates are now charging ₹215 per kg of cargo, compared with around ₹60 per kg earlier, following the partial reopening of airspace, Mr. Suresh said.

Daily News Analysis

UPSC Relevance: In Indian law, this is related to Section 32 (Contingent Contracts) and Section 56 (Doctrine of Frustration) of the Indian Contract Act, 1872.

Benefit: Official recognition would protect exporters from legal penalties for "non-performance" or "delayed delivery" and facilitate smoother negotiations with banks and insurers.

Static Section:

India-West Asia Relations

Economic Significance: West Asia is India's largest trading partner region. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a major destination for Indian labor and a source of nearly \$90 billion in annual remittances.

Energy Security: Over 50% of India's crude oil and 70% of its LNG pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

Strategic Connectivity: Projects like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), designed to bypass traditional bottlenecks, are now under threat due to regional instability.

Agricultural Exports

APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority): A statutory body under the Ministry of Commerce and Industry. It is responsible for the export promotion of fruits, vegetables, and meat products.

Supply Chain Vulnerability: The crisis highlights the lack of "Cold Chain" infrastructure. When flights are cancelled, the absence of long-term refrigerated storage at airports leads to immediate financial loss for farmers.

Commodity	Major Markets in West Asia
Basmati Rice	Iran, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, UAE
Perishables	UAE, Qatar, Oman, Kuwait
Spices/Seafood	Saudi Arabia, Europe (via West Asia transit)

Conclusion

The West Asia crisis serves as a reminder of India's "Vulnerability to External Shocks." While India maintains a policy of "Strategic Autonomy," the economic interlinkage with the Gulf means that regional peace is a prerequisite for India's domestic economic stability. The government must balance diplomatic maneuvering with immediate logistical support (like dedicated "Cargo Charters") to prevent a total collapse of the agricultural export value chain.

UPSC Prelims Exam Practice Question

Ques: With reference to Force Majeure, consider the following statements:

1. It refers to unforeseeable events that prevent the fulfilment of contractual obligations.
2. In India, it is related to provisions under the Indian Contract Act, 1872.
3. It automatically cancels all commercial contracts during war.

Which of the statements given above is/are correct?

- A. 1 only
- B. 1 and 2 only
- C. 2 and 3 only
- D. 1, 2 and 3

Ans: B)

UPSC Mains Exam Practice Question

Ques: Disruptions in global supply chains due to geopolitical conflicts expose the vulnerability of India's agricultural exports. Analyse with reference to the recent West Asia crisis. **(250 words)**



Transforming representation into real change by 2029

In 2029, India will have the most gender-representative Parliament in its history. The Women's Reservation Act will reserve one-third of the seats in the Lok Sabha for women – the largest single expansion of political representation this country has ever legislated. This moment has been decades in the making. If the next three years are squandered, it will not deliver what it promises.

There is an immediacy

Representation without an agenda is just presence. The women who walk into Parliament in 2029 will change what gets discussed only if the issues that matter to them have already been named, fought for, and demanded loudly enough to become political priorities. That work cannot begin in 2029. It has to begin now. And there is no issue more urgent, more invisible, or more ready to be addressed than this: India lacks a policy framework for elder care that clearly accounts for women – and there is no political tradition of demanding one.

Gauri is one of millions of women in India for whom this is not a policy abstraction. Her eighty-three-year-old mother lives alone in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, ageing the way most Indian women do: quietly, trying to hold on to her innate dignity, with almost no support from the state. Gauri travels back when she can, handling immediate emergencies and worrying about the rest – like so many daughters and daughters-in-law who hold two worlds together simultaneously. What keeps Gauri up at night is not the exhaustion. It is the recognition that she could end up ageing like her mother the same way. And she is done accepting that quietly.

What Gauri wants, for her mother, and for herself, is a state that builds the guardrails for women to age with dignity. She wants elder care



Barkha Deva

works on policy for dignified ageing and elder care

Parliament 2029 must transform women's lives, with its representatives well aware of what guardrails women need to age with dignity

treated as public infrastructure, not private misfortune. And she wants to know that when she votes in 2029 for the most representative Parliament this country has ever elected, its representatives will already know what she needs.

An ageing India

India is ageing faster than its public conversation acknowledges. Over 100 million Indians are already above 60 years; that number will cross 250 million by the year 2040. Women will outlive men by four to five years on average, but those extra years have a compounded disadvantage:

lower lifetime savings, broken employment histories, no assets in their own name, and no caregiver when they need one the most. The National Policy for Older Persons (1999) and the Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme address the elderly through a lens of poverty and health, with no gender dimension. Ageing women are simply not a category the systems in India are built to recognise.

The cost of that invisibility is written in the numbers. A study, in 2023, in the journal *Alzheimer's & Dementia*, estimates that 8.8 million Indians over the age of 60 are living with dementia today, a number expected to nearly double by 2036 – with women disproportionately affected, more likely to be living alone when cognitive decline sets in, and less likely to have anyone looking out for them. This is what a state that never designed elder care around women actually produces. Parliamentary records reveal why it persists – the Parliamentary Questions database has virtually no questions on ageing women, there are no private member Bills, or

committee attention. What Maharashtra showed recently is that the state can move quickly when it chooses to recognise the realities of women's lives. In January 2026, the State launched menopause clinics across 580 government facilities, backed by decades of advocacy. The result was that over 31,000 women came forward in five weeks.

They had been waiting, in silence, for the State to name their reality. Elder care and dignified ageing wait for the same decision.

The need for insight

Political parties are already preparing candidate pipelines for the reserved seats. But fielding women is not the same as changing what Parliament talks about. The women and men who will make the Parliament of 2029 count are those who arrive having read the room – who understand that representing women means representing the full arc of their lives; not just the years of careers and children, but the decades that follow, when every gap the state

has ignored becomes a daily reality. That understanding must be built into the candidate, the campaign, and the manifesto – through a census that captures age- and gender-disaggregated data, budgets that report elder care spending transparently, and parties that make dignified ageing a political commitment before the election, not after.

When Gauri votes in 2029, she will be thinking about all of this. She will be thinking about her mother, and about herself, and about whether this Parliament, the most representative in India's history, can build the country that women like her were promised. Three years is enough time to get this right. We cannot afford to get it wrong.



GS Paper I : Indian Society

UPSC Mains Practice Question: India is witnessing a rapid demographic transition towards an ageing population. Discuss the socio-economic challenges faced by elderly women in India. (250 Words)

Context :

The year 2029 marks a watershed moment for Indian democracy as the Women's Reservation Act (Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam) will be implemented, ensuring one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha. However, the author, Barkha Deva, cautions that presence without an agenda is hollow. A critical, yet overlooked, priority for this new representative body must be a gender-sensitive framework for elder care. As India undergoes a demographic shift, the lack of a state-supported infrastructure

for dignified ageing disproportionately affects women, who face a "compounded disadvantage" of longevity paired with financial and social precariousness.

The Impending Crisis of an Ageing India

India is transitioning from a "young" nation to an ageing one faster than policy frameworks are evolving.

Demographic Shift: Currently, over 100 million Indians are above 60; this is projected to reach **250 million by 2040**.

The Gender Gap in Ageing: Women generally outlive men by 4–5 years. However, these extra years are often marked by:

- Lower lifetime savings due to the gender pay gap.
- Broken employment histories due to caregiving roles.
- Lack of asset ownership (land/house) in their own names.

Health and Vulnerability: Women are disproportionately affected by cognitive declines like dementia (estimated 8.8 million cases in India currently) and are more likely to live alone during these stages.

Policy Gaps and Political Invisibility

The editorial highlights a stark disconnect between the reality of elderly women and the legislative focus:

Outdated Frameworks: The **National Policy for Older Persons (1999)** and the **Indira Gandhi National Old Age Pension Scheme** view the elderly through a generic lens of poverty and health, completely ignoring the unique gender dimensions of ageing.

Legislative Silence: Analysis of Parliamentary databases shows a near-total absence of questions, Private Member Bills, or committee reports specifically targeting the needs of ageing women.

The "Private Misfortune" Myth: Currently, elder care is treated as a family responsibility (often falling on daughters and daughters-in-law) rather than **public infrastructure**.

The Way Forward: From Representation to Action

To ensure the 2029 Parliament is truly transformative, the author suggests:

Naming the Reality: Success in Maharashtra (launching 580 menopause clinics in 2026) proves that when the state recognizes specific female health needs, women respond in thousands. Elder care needs similar state recognition.

Data-Driven Policy: India needs a census that captures age- and gender-disaggregated data to understand the specific needs of elderly women living alone.

Transparent Budgeting: "Gender Budgeting" must expand to include elder care spending.

Political Commitment: Candidates for the 2029 elections must include "Dignified Ageing" in their manifestos today, ensuring it is a political priority before they enter Parliament.

Static Section

1. Constitutional and Legal Provisions

Article 41 (DPSP): The State shall, within the limits of its economic capacity, make effective provision for securing the right to work, to education, and to public assistance in cases of old age.

Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007: Provides a legal framework for children/heirs to provide maintenance to senior citizens.

The 106th Amendment Act (Women's Reservation Bill): Provides 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

2. Existing Schemes

PM Vaya Vandana Yojana: A pension scheme for senior citizens offering guaranteed returns.

SAMPANN Project: An online pension processing system for pensioners.

SAGE (Seniorcare Ageing Growth Engine): To support startups in the elder care space.

Conclusion

True representation is not just about the gender of the person sitting in the chair; it is about the lived experiences they bring to the floor of the House. For Gauri and millions of women like her, the 2029 Parliament represents a flicker of hope—a chance to move elder care from a "private struggle" to a "state responsibility." The next three years are vital to building an agenda that ensures every Indian woman can age with the dignity she deserves. If the political class fails to define this agenda now, the historic expansion of representation in 2029 will be a missed opportunity for India's most vulnerable citizens.

